

Long Ago Duxbury

By Alison Arnold

THOSE WHO KNOW Duxbury only as a popular summer resort or a growing exurban community miss much of its true quality. Of course, it was a "summer place" 50 years ago, but it wasn't "smart" then and no one worried about how many Cadillacs his neighbor had or who invited whom to cocktail parties.

The sturdy old houses in the village still stand beneath disappearing wine-glass elms. Most of them have been carefully restored and are lovingly tended by their new owners. But who lived in them back in the days before Duxbury became "the place to live"?

The little yellow house snuggled among evergreens on Washington St. near Winsor St., where Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Jacques Jr. now live used to be the home of Miss Jenny Alden. Jenny was named Jane when she was born there, but that was too sedate a name for a sprightly little old maid who had a smile for everyone.

A direct descendant of John and Priscilla, Jenny lived alone after her parents died and the little old house was filled with family heirlooms. Her collection of china included Chelsea and Lowestoft and we cherish some blue and white plates she gave us one faraway summer afternoon.

Jenny never complained, but she must have been very lonely living with her memories. Her father's hat hung on a peg in the hall long after he died. It made her feel "he'd be back soon."

Farther along Washington St. lived Miss Sarah Higgins, for many years the librarian at the Duxbury Library. She was known as "Pet Higgins" to youngsters who visited the library and were greeted with pursed lips and raised eyebrows when they took out any books that were more sophisticated than the "Elsie Dinsmore" or "Dotty Dimple" series.

Nearby, where the vanWeels live, was Charlie Josselyn's house. He had a little store at Snug Harbor. Charlie was lame but he walked to the store and back every day and was always patient with little girls who came in to buy paper dolls on rainy days.

The big white house where the Richard Lameres now live on Washington St. was once the home of Capt. and Mrs. Beadle. He was a dapper little man who always wore white in summer. Mrs. Beadle was an imposing woman who made it her duty to make a formal call on each newcomer. She was born in the Cape Cod house now owned by the Robert Seymours.

W.O. Peterson had a thriving grocery store in the house where the Walter Princes now live. "Willie Ote," as he was known to his friends, was a tiny frail-looking man who became blind before he died. His wife, the former Mary Hatch, was a stout, florid woman who managed the family with an iron hand. She had a forbidding manner, but a warm spot in her heart for children.

Mrs. Peterson had a large family of cats sired by Mose, a huge black Tom. He used to sit on the counter and listen solemnly to the heated discussions around the pot-bellied stove in winter and the cracker barrel in summer. Mrs. Peterson made bayberry candles and beach plum jelly and kept white fan-tailed pigeons that were most decorative on the lawn in front of her house on Surplus St.

Next door lived Mr. and Mrs. William Alden. "Willie" was a direct descendant of John and a pleasant genial person he was. Rumor said that he met his wife through a matrimonial bureau and they courted by letters. At any rate, their marriage lasted and they lived to a ripe old age. Raspberry bushes on their land were a great temptation to the children in the neighborhood.

Farther along Surplus St., where the John Clarks now live, was the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Henry Weston. "Bill Hen," as he was affectionately called, had a name for each of his hens. Henrietta was one of his favorites. In the summer he sold his vegetables and was a familiar figure trudging along behind his wheelbarrow. Mrs. Weston was a tiny rosy-cheeked little woman, whose house was spotlessly neat and clean.

We're sure she'd love to see the improvements in her house and the garden that used to be just a place where hens scratched and clucked. We like to see the old places kept up so nicely, too, but sometimes we like to think about long ago Duxbury and of those who lived here when the summers seemed to last forever.